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**FORESTS  
AND  
FOREST DEVASTATION  
IN THE BIBLE**



**UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOREST SERVICE**

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*“And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight.”*

**FORESTS  
AND  
FOREST DEVASTATIONS  
IN THE BIBLE**



*“The rivers and waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness.”*

## FOREWORD

*FREQUENT reference is made in the Bible to trees, the benefits of trees, and the destruction of trees. Sometimes directly and sometimes hidden in simile and allegory the Bible refers to the ravages of forest fires and the ill effects of forest devastation.*

*These passages are worthy of study today because we are learning anew that conservation of the natural resources with which the Divine Providence has blessed us is essential to the continued welfare of our people and of our Nation. Dissipation and waste of these resources today will bring punishment in the form of loss and misery just as described in the Bible.*

*It is suggested that the references set forth in this booklet be used as the basis for lessons or study and discussion in Sunday Schools, young people's meetings, and Bible classes. These passages have striking wisdom and beauty and form the theme for sermons on appropriate occasions.*



In the Bible God is represented as ordaining that man should wake to life embowered in a garden of trees, thus:

*Genesis ii:8-9*, "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

The Palm Tree of Deborah under which she sat and "judged Israel" is linked with her piety and vision of God and His teachings.

"The trees of the good sing out. He who has never heard the voice of the trees is poor in knowledge", says Chronicles.

In *II Samuel v:24*, David receives a message of God from the Mulberry Tree rustlings. Even today the troubled spirit of man finds renewed faith in God and man, new strength and peace and courage in the quiet and beauty of the forest.

### FOREST DEVASTATION

Everywhere man as he begins to practice the acts of civilized life or undertakes to establish a home and a settlement on a new frontier lays with a light heart a heavy hand on the primeval forest, and finds that the byproducts of his clearings make for agricultural purposes and supply the means of shelter and of fuel for his cooking and his warmth. He may be encouraged by the spectacle of the natural regeneration in his abandoned clearings to think that the forest can take care of itself. He does not worry himself as to the effect that this reckless felling or burning may have on the fourth or fifth or even fiftieth generation.

In past centuries when man's civilization was given time enough and scope enough, he produced in an entire region like Palestine or a vast area like China, a state of things in which the once fertile land was stripped bare and left defenseless against soil erosion and so became a prey to recurrent floods, drought, and famine. These scenes of devastation have not, and probably cannot, be remedied.

The book of Joel opens with an allegory in which the Judgment of God takes the form of a fire. Joel describes accurately the appearance and the terrible effect of forest fires:

"How do the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed because they have no pasture! Yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. Oh, Lord, to Thee will I cry for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field cry also unto Thee: for the rivers and waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness. Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness. It is 'A day of clouds and thick darkness.' The fire is 'Like the dawn spread upon the mountain.' The flames are as a great people set in battle array, the appearance of them is as horses and as horsemen do they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains do they leap. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; and they march every one on his way. They break not their ranks, neither doth one thrust another, they march every one in his path. They leap upon the city, they

run upon the wall, they climb up into the houses, they enter in at the windows, like a thief. The earth quaketh before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon are darkened and the stars withdraw their shining."

Joel's description of a fire has its counterpart too often in America. The careless hand of man has started like conflagrations that have laid whole regions waste, have burned not only forests, but homes and towns, have destroyed not only the wild game of the woods, but have swept over farmsteads and destroyed domestic flocks and have taken a terrible toll of human life.

Isaiah likens the punishment for evil-doing and turning away from worship of God to the ravages of forest and field fires:

*Isaiah v:24*, "Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust. Because they have cast away the word of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

*Isaiah x:16*, "Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire."

*Isaiah ix:18-19*, "For wickedness burneth as the fire; it devoureth as the briars and thorns; yea, it kindleth in the thickets of the forest and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. Through the wrath of the Lord of Hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire; no man shall spare his brother."

*Isaiah x:18-19*, That a fire "Shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standard bearer fainteth, and the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them."

Ezekial also uses the effect of forest fires to describe the punishment for evil-doing:

*Ezekial xx:47*, "Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein."

Isaiah speaks of reforestation:

"I will set in the desert the fir tree and the pine."

Ezekial predicts deforestation:

"Upon the mountainside and in the valleys his branches are fallen and his boughs are broken—and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow and have left him."

Exodus prescribes for human carelessness in setting forest or other fires:

*Exodus xxii:6*, "If a fire break out, and catch in thorns so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution."

In Deuteronomy we find instructions against forest devastation with the simple admonition that "The tree of the field is man's life." The prophet might have added that it was a source of the nation's or of civilization's greatness and permanence, because history has repeatedly shown that when the natural resources disappear the nation and its civilization also decline.

St. John if he lived today might say of our modern forest devastation and soil erosion as he did in Revelation:

"Hurt not the earth nor the trees."



## OUR COUNTRY'S FORESTS

The American people have been wasteful of their forest wealth. The bulk of remaining virgin timber supply lies in the States on the Pacific Coast. When this is gone they will have to grow what timber they use as no foreign supply is available. But there is enough forest land, some 650 million acres or more, which will grow timber if fire is kept out. Already over 83 million acres have been so ravaged by repeated forest fires that it is an idle waste and will have to be reforested before it again grows trees.

The American people burn over more than 40 million acres of forest land each year and destroy more than 5 billion feet of timber. Annually almost 15 billion feet of saw timber is cut and used. On the average, in the neighborhood of 150,000 forest fires occur each year, out of which over 90 percent are man caused and less than 10 percent are caused by lightning.

Of the number of fires, 35 percent are due to carelessness. Smokers and campers who thoughtlessly toss lighted matches or burning cigar or cigarette stubs into the inflammable debris on the forest floor, or who go away without extinguishing their campfire before leaving, set these fires. About 25 percent of the number of fires are set by incendiaries who do it to deliberately destroy another's property or home, or who hope to derive some special benefit from the fire. Approximately 20 percent of the number of fires can be traced directly to negligence of those who live or work in or near the forest, as for example, the farmer or logger who lets a clearing or slash fire get away.

This is not very good stewardship of the bounty God has placed at our disposal. Is it any wonder that we run into difficulties and suffer misery and want when we so carelessly and thoughtlessly abuse His gifts?

Three great Presidents of the United States, all men of high moral purpose, have striven unceasingly for American conservation and the protection of our woods from fire. What they have said is worthy of deep consideration on the part of all Americans.

"Any nation which in its youth lives only for the day, reaps without sowing, and consumes without husbanding, must expect the penalty of the prodigal, whose labor could with difficulty find him the bare means of life. A people without children would face a hopeless future, a country without trees is almost as hopeless. Forests which are so used that they cannot renew themselves will soon vanish and with them all their benefits."

—*Theodore Roosevelt.*

"A tree saved is a tree grown. We hold the resources of our country as a trust. Flourishing woodlands mean more than timber crops, permanent industries, and an adequate supply of wood. They minister to our need for outdoor recreation; they preserve animal and bird life; they protect and beautify our hillsides and feed our streams; they preserve the inspiring natural environment which has contributed so much to American character."

—*Calvin Coolidge.*

"The handling of our forests as a continuous, renewable resource means permanent employment and stability to our country life. The forests are also needed for mitigating extreme climatic fluctuations, for holding the soil on the slopes, retaining the moisture in the ground, and controlling the equable flow of water in our streams. The forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people. Truly, they make the country more livable."

—*Franklin D. Roosevelt.*

Those whose duty is the stewardship of the Nation's forests, on which depend so much of our hopes for prosperity and human happiness, are striving year by year to preserve our forests and prevent the devastation caused by forest fires.

You who live in or near wooded areas and enjoy their many benefits are urged to assist in this protection by using constant care yourself, and impressing this need upon others—

1. In brush burning for land clearing, notify your neighbors and the nearest Forest Ranger or Forest Warden; build the piles small; choose a quiet day; don't leave until the fires are dead out.
2. Extinguish campfires or warming fires completely before leaving them.
3. Crush out your cigarette or pipe ash before you throw it aside.
4. Break your match in two before you toss it away.